

MISSOURI RIVER

R E C O V E R Y P R O G R A M



US Army Corps
of Engineers



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LIFE ON THE RIVER: MRRIC Charter Approved

On July 1, 2008, Assistant Secretary of the Army for Civil Works, the Honorable John Paul Woodley, Jr., signed the Implementation Guidance for Section 5018 of the Water Resources Development Act of 2007 (WRDA 2007). The Guidance was signed at a meeting of the Missouri River Recovery Implementation Committee (MRRIC) Planning Group, held in St. Louis, Mo. By signing the Guidance, Mr. Woodley approved the MRRIC Charter and established the Committee.

Approval of the MRRIC Charter is the culmination of over a year of intense work by the MRRIC Planning Group – a representative group of Missouri River basin Tribes, states and diverse stakeholder interests – to develop a Recommended Charter for the Committee. Federal agencies in the basin also participated in the process by forming a Federal Working Group to assist the Planning Group.

As a member of the Federal Working Group, it is gratifying to see the successful conclusion of this first phase and to look forward to future opportunities. The fact that the Charter for the MRRIC was agreed upon by representatives from the range of basin Tribes, states and stakeholders is a truly remarkable achievement. The people in the Missouri River basin can now move Missouri River recovery forward in a collaborative manner that takes into account the values of the people who work and live on the river.

The MRRIC will provide a proactive, participatory process in which Tribes, states and stakeholders will be involved up front in crafting a vision for the Missouri River and seeking collaborative solutions for moving that vision forward. The MRRIC will provide guidance to the Corps and other agencies regarding the existing mitigation and recovery program and will play a key role in the upcoming study authorized by Section 5018 of the WRDA 2007 to develop a plan for Missouri River recovery, mitigation and restoration.

In addition to approving the charter, the Implementation Guidance signed by the Assistant Secretary delegates the authority to implement the Charter, including the stakeholder member selection and appointment processes, to the Commander of the Northwestern Division. The Corps intends to move forward with the appointment and application process and convene the first meeting of the MRRIC as quickly as possible. We encourage all interested individuals and parties to get involved in what is sure to be a historic undertaking.

Sincerely,

Joe Cothurn

*Environmental Protection Agency, Region 7 and
Federal Working Group member*

More
information
on MRRIC,
including the list
of states, Tribes
and stakeholder
interests eligible
for membership
and the process
for applying, is
available at:
www.MRRIC.org.

ADAPTIVE MANAGEMENT

Incomplete knowledge and understanding of the Missouri River's large, diverse and complex ecosystem create challenges for making good recovery decisions. By implementing the Integrated Science Program, the Missouri River Recovery Program (MRRP) team strives to ensure that the best available science informs decisions about recovery.

The MRRP uses an adaptive management strategy, which combines collaboration, planning and science while monitoring and measuring performance over time to learn more about the individual components of a complex ecological system and the effectiveness of recovery actions. Adaptive management also allows for modification of recovery activities as new information becomes available.

In addition, the adaptive management approach considers the social and economic concerns within the basin to develop a comprehensive strategy for making good environmental decisions. Adaptive management broadens the decision-making process to take into account the uncertainties, conflicts and social issues that may not have been part of the process before. Once convened, the Missouri River Recovery Implementation Committee (MRRIC) will play a key role in the future implementation of adaptive management.

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RIVER RESPONSE: ANSWERS TO YOUR QUESTIONS

Is it really possible to restore habitat, recover species and fulfill all the Corps' authorized purposes on the Missouri River?

Yes! In its 2003 Amended Biological Opinion (2003 Amended BiOp), the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service concluded that if the Corps implements specified actions to recover populations of pallid sturgeon, least tern and piping plover, the Corps' Missouri and Kansas river projects - while serving the congressionally-authorized project purposes - would not jeopardize these species. As the following examples demonstrate, the actions identified in the 2003 Amended BiOp can be effective in recovering Missouri River protected species:

- By making minor modifications to how water is released from Gavins Point Dam, the Corps is able to protect least tern and piping plover nests and eggs. Monitoring crews achieve this by identifying locations where birds are nesting and recording the elevations of their nests. They then report this information to the Reservoir Control Center in Omaha, which in turn adjusts water releases, when possible, to avoid damaging nesting sites.
- The 1993 flood created the Lisbon Bottoms chute in Missouri. During monitoring activities, juvenile sturgeon were discovered at the mouth of the chute – a place scientists had never seen them before. The design of chutes that are currently being constructed to provide species habitat reflects what we learned from Lisbon Bottoms.
- Monitoring by the Iowa Department of Natural Resources has found that created side channel chutes and backwater areas provide habitat to threatened and endangered species at three times the biodiversity of the main channel.

NEW ON THE WEB

The MRRP team continues to add information to our program Web site: www.moriverrecovery.org. Check out the MRRP 2007 Annual Report, which documents the Corps' compliance with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's 2003 Amended Biological Opinion. From the home page, click on Key Documents and then choose 2007 Annual Report from the list of documents available for download.

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ADAPTIVE Management

This summer, some of the Integrated Science Program team activities being conducted to inform adaptive management decision making include:

- identifying piping plover and least tern nesting areas, conducting an adult bird census and determining the number of young plovers and terns raised on the river this year;
- tracking pallid sturgeon fitted with radio transmitters;
- monitoring flood plain drainage and groundwater levels to document any changes occurring from a spring pulse released from Gavins Point Dam and from other naturally occurring events downstream; and
- collecting pallid sturgeon and other Missouri River fish to determine the effectiveness of stocking activities and to assess fish health and population levels.

Several science reports have been posted to the MRRP Web site, under Key Documents: www.moriverrecovery.org.

The mission of the Missouri River Recovery Program is to implement actions to accomplish Missouri River ecosystem recovery goals in coordination and collaboration with agency partners and stakeholders. The vision of the program is to create a sustainable ecosystem supporting thriving populations of native species while providing for current social and economic values.

For more information on the Missouri River Recovery Program, please visit www.moriverrecovery.org.

